

In Defense of Freedom of Speech

Recently, the Wisconsin Realtors Association (WRA) withdrew its endorsement of State Supreme Court candidate Brian Hagedorn, explaining that “recent disclosures regarding past statements and actions” by Hagedorn led to their decision.

Here is the WRA statement in its entirety:

“As a result of recent disclosures regarding past statements and actions by Wisconsin Supreme Court candidate Brian Hagedorn, the Wisconsin REALTORS® Association has withdrawn its endorsement of his candidacy. The real estate related issues that served as the basis for our endorsement have been overshadowed by other, non-real estate related issues – issues with which we do not want to be associated and that directly conflict with the principles of our organization and the values of our members.”

The WRA statement in no way challenges Judge Hagedorn’s Christian faith. It simply says they believe that some of the Judge’s past statements and actions are in conflict with the values and principles of its members. **If WRA’s critics were being honest, they would acknowledge that the WRA has every right to consider Hagedorn’s extensive written record and determine whether those views are intolerant and outside the mainstream of public opinion and that of their members.**

Instead, some conservative opinion leaders, including some politicians, have viciously accused the WRA of being “anti-religious zealots.” This is a bogus and cynical claim that is being used to suppress the rights of others to speak freely. No one, including the WRA, is disputing Judge Hagedorn’s right to his beliefs. And no one should dispute the WRA’s right to free speech and association based on their own values and beliefs.

The WRA is not a group of anti-religious zealots or zealots of any kind. The WRA is a trade and business association representing a large membership as diverse as the voting population itself. The group exists exclusively to serve the interests of their members, period. Sometimes that includes supporting candidates for public office that best represent those interests. That is a right and a choice we are all afforded under the First Amendment. And when the WRA determined that they could no longer support Judge Hagedorn that was also their First Amendment right. **Especially when you consider that Judge Hagedorn says he stands by everything he has written.**

Those who continue to attack the WRA or any group or individual that chooses not to support a candidate for any reason are denying their right to free speech and association. Their actions are more likely to force other players off the field than to shame them into the game.

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